

THE BRAZEN SERPENT.



“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life,” John iii. 14, 15.

IN these words the way of salvation is set before us, in the plainest manner. The history of Moses lifting up the serpent is related in Numbers, chap. xxi. The following is a short account of it; but you will do well to read the whole in the Bible. The Israelites, while travelling from Egypt to Canaan, had offended God by their murmuring, ungrateful spirit. To punish them, God “sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, and much people of Israel died.” This brought them to a sense of their sinful conduct; and they desired Moses to pray to God for them. Moses did pray for the people; the Lord heard him, and commanded him to make a brazen serpent, and to set it upon a pole, in order that every one that was bitten might look upon it and live.

Now, reader, attend to the important truths which this history teaches. As the bodies of the Israelites were bitten by the fiery serpents, so sin has wounded our souls, and poisoned every part of them. Our understanding, conscience, affections, will, memory, have all

suffered. The poison runs through the whole soul, just as the blood runs through the veins, into every part of the body. "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint; from the sole of the foot, even unto the head, there is no soundness in it," Isa. i. 5, 6. And the effects of this corrupt nature, which we receive from our first parents, and which is called original, or birth sin, are but too evident. They appear in our constant violation of God's holy law, in thought, word, and deed. Thus original sin leads to actual sin. The tree is corrupt, and therefore the fruit is corrupt. And, though some may show the dreadful consequences of this poison more than others, though some may run greater lengths of sin than others, all go as far in transgression as God's restraining grace, and their peculiar temptations and opportunities, will allow. And as many of the Israelites died of their wounds, so thousands of men and women are dying daily of the wound of sin. Yes, sin destroys both body and soul in hell. Reader, these awful truths should lead you to a serious concern for your immortal soul. But do you ask, Is there no cure? Must we despair? No; hear the joyful tidings of the gospel. As Moses placed the brazen serpent upon the pole, for the healing of the wounded Israelites, so God lifted up his only Son Jesus Christ upon the cross, that guilty sinners might not perish, but have eternal life. There was no virtue in the brazen serpent, but it was God's appointment, and he was pleased to heal all who looked upon it; but there is a virtue in a crucified Saviour. His death is a sufficient sacrifice for the atonement of our sins. His precious bloodshedding fully answers all the demands of God's broken law. He suffered as our Surety, in our stead; and, when he cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" he was forsaken of his Father, that we might not be for ever banished from his presence in hell. Dear reader, know of a truth, that sinful and guilty as you are, both by nature and practice, there is in Christ Jesus plenteous redemption. Not only is the crucified Saviour the appointed means of salvation for sinners, but he is an all-sufficient means. His precious blood is all the price which God requires to redeem your soul from hell. His infinite merits, his perfect righteousness, will ensure your acceptance with the Father, and prove a good title to his glorious kingdom. Do you ask how these blessings may be made your own? I answer that, as the

wounded Israelite was healed simply because he fixed his eyes on the brazen serpent, so you can obtain healing for your soul, and eternal life from Christ, only by faith in him. The Israelite looked to the brazen serpent, smarting with his wound, fearful of the consequences of it, despairing of all human help, and believing that God's way of healing would be successful. Now, you must do the same. Have your sins found you out? Are you no longer "dead in trespasses and sins?" Eph. ii. 1; without any feeling of them, or sorrow on account of them? Do you see, that, as a guilty sinner, you are in danger of everlasting death? Look then to Christ. Believe that he is able and willing to save you. Venture to trust wholly to his plenteous redemption, and you shall not perish. You shall have eternal life. You shall have the pledge and foretaste of it, in peace of conscience, the joys of God's Spirit, the delight of communion with him here on earth, and the blessed and lively hope of enjoying for ever his presence in a happier world. For, "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God," Rom. v. 1, 2.

Know then, dear reader, that believing in Christ is looking to him in faith, as "all our salvation, and all our desire." But do you ask, what place we give to good works? I will tell you. They spring out of that lively faith in Christ which alone justifies. I think this may be made very plain to you. Faith not only brings before our eyes the wonderful love of Christ, in his work of redemption, but enables us to see our part and interest in it. And when we not only believe that Christ died for a sinful world, but bring this truth home, and believe that he died for us, and put away our sins, then our hearts are filled with love to such a gracious Saviour; and, like dutiful and affectionate children, we desire to show our love, by pleasing him, and keeping his commandments. Thus, "faith worketh by love," Gal. v. 6; and love leads to holy obedience: and thus we know in ourselves, that virtue has come out of Christ for our healing; and thus we show to others, in our new life and conduct, that our spiritual health is recovered.

But it is only the convinced sinner who will value a Saviour, and look up to him for healing. The greater part of men, even of men called Christians, see no beauty in Christ

that they should desire him, Isa. liii. 2; and for this plain reason, because they know not themselves, and feel not the wound of sin. Is this your case, reader? Unhappy soul! you are whole in your own opinion, and therefore need not a physician. There is "balm in Gilead" ready for you, Jer. viii. 22; the heavenly Physician waits to heal you: but you look not to Christ, because you think you have need of nothing, or perhaps because you madly hope for healing in some other way; or, it may be, because you are spending your days in awful indifference, and care for none of these things.

Oh that you would now receive the warning of a friend, who fears lest you should discover your spiritual disease when it is too late to heal it! Sinner, look at Jesus! Too long have you "hid your face" from him, too long have you "despised and rejected" him, Isa. liii. But "was ever sorrow like unto his sorrow?" Lam. i. 12. See his agony and bloody sweat, his cross and passion! Would he have borne these, if sinful man could do without him? Was he not "wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities?" And is it not "by his stripes that we are healed?" Isa. liii. 5. Look, then, to Him whom you have pierced, Zech. xii. 10; and learn in the cross of Christ, the greatness of your sins which required such sufferings, and the greatness of that love which was willing to bear them for you.

Look to the dying Saviour, till you learn to mourn, and be in bitterness for those sins which pierced him; and till your hearts overflow with gratitude and love to the Friend of sinners.

As the serpent, raised by Moses,
Heal'd the burning serpent's bite;
Jesus thus himself discloses
To the wounded sinner's sight.

Hear his gracious invitation,
"I have life and peace to give,
I have wrought out full salvation;
Sinner, look to me, and live."

THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY;
56, PATERNOSTER ROW, AND 65, ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD.

[Price 1s. per 100.]